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PhD in Social Health Sciences
2015-2016

INVITATION to the Public defence of

Agnes ARREY

To obtain the academic degree of '**DOCTOR IN SOCIAL HEALTH SCIENCES**'

**Experiences of sub-Saharan African Migrant Women Living
and Aging with HIV/AIDS in Belgium: an ethnographic
study****Friday 20 May 2016**

Auditorium **Brouwer**, 17:00
Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, Laarbeeklaan 103, 1090 Brussel

How to reach the campus Jette:

<http://www.vub.ac.be/english/infoabout/campuses>



Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Summary of the dissertation

Globally, an estimated 36.9 million people are living with HIV that may cause AIDS. Women are more likely than men to contract HIV. HIV prevalence is exceptionally high among sub-Saharan African women (SSA). This pattern is mirrored among SSA migrant women living in Western Europe. Until now, there has been little research on the lived experiences of SSA women with HIV/AIDS in Belgium, despite the number of women in care (about 3,300). The aim of our study was to explore the experiences of SSA women living with HIV/AIDS. Coping strategies employed by these women to live and age well with HIV/AIDS were also examined. This qualitative ethnographic study collected data through interviews, observations and hospital records of HIV/AIDS positive SSA women in Belgium. Patients were purposively recruited from consultation lists by HIV care providers. Snowball sampling of self-identified women with HIV/AIDS was also used for recruitment. Forty four women and eight healthcare providers participated. Data collected for this study were analyzed using thematic analysis and rooted in the basic principles of grounded theory. The main themes that emerged were: disclosure concerns, stigma, self-stigma, discrimination, access to healthcare based on migrant status, intimate partner violence and centrality of motherhood/caregiver role. Active coping strategies included: access to treatment and care, support and empathy, spirituality/religion and selective disclosure. Passive coping included denial, social distancing, non-disclosure and avoidance. Gender-responsive care and grassroots efforts to drive inequality and stigma out of healthcare should be addressed. The need to go beyond the continuum of care and develop specific stigma-reduction and behavioural programs is more urgent.

Curriculum Vitae

Agnes Ebotabe Arrey was born on 20th may 1958 in Kumba, Cameroon. She studied law in the University of Yaoundé, Cameroon, graduating with a LL.B in 1982. She worked in the Department of Treasury, Cameroon from 1983-2002. She moved to Belgium in 2002 and obtained an MBA in Leadership and Change Management in 2003 and a postgraduate diploma in Entrepreneurship and New Ventures from the United Business Institute, Brussels in 2004. She later obtained an MA *magna cum laude* in International Politics from Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) in 2005. In 2006, she was employed as a finance assistant at the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Brussels. She was unemployed between 2007 and 2009 but took Dutch and office management courses sponsored by the Flemish Vocational Training Centre (VDAB). In 2009 she obtained an MSc *cum laude* in Cultures and Development Studies from Katholiek Universiteit Leuven (KULeuven) and a postgraduate diploma, *cum laude* in International Education from GroepT-KULeuven.

She started her doctoral studies in 2011 while working with GOM, a service provider in Belgium. She is an affiliated member of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology (EADV), Belgian Association of Public Health (BAPH), The Well Project (HIV), Be-cause Health, Be-Gender and the Union of African Population Studies (UAPS). She also reviews for international scientific journals.

Agnes lives in Merchtem, Flemish Brabant. She is married and has three children and a grandson. She is very well integrated in her local community. She is an active member of Forever Young Choir, one of the choir groups in her parish and she is also a member of FEMMA, an association that bring women together to discuss, relax, teach and exchange experiences.